

## Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 SAB-01 SAM-01 CIEP-03 CIAE-00

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RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SCCT-02 SY-04 SR-02

ORM-03 AID-20 EB-11 TRSE-00 ACDA-19 IO-14 DRC-01 /174 W  
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P R 291113Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3711

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4954

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IS, US

SUBJ: ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE ON EVE  
OF RABIN'S US VISIT

SUMMARY. RABIN'S FIRST US VISIT AS PRIME MINISTER WILL MARK END  
OF NEW GOVERNMENT'S FIRST 100 DAYS DURING WHICH HIS DOMESTIC  
POLITICAL POSITION HAS STEADILY STRENGTHENED. ISRAELI PUBLIC  
HAS BEEN IMPRESSED BY BOTH SUBSTANCE AND MANNER OF GOI DECISIONS  
IN HANDLING ARAB TERRORISM, ILLEGAL WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS AND  
OVERHEATED ECONOMY. RABIN'S WASHINGTON TRIP WILL BE IMPORTANT  
TEST OF HIS LEADERSHIP, AND OUTCOME, IN TERMS OF CONTINUED US  
POLITICAL, MILITARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT, WILL BE INTERPRETED  
AS MAJOR SIGNPOST FOR FUTURE OF US-ISRAEL RELATIONS AND ARAB-  
ISRAELI NEGOTIATING PROSPECTS. LOOKING TO FUTURE, ISRAELIS  
BELIEVE THAT FOREIGN, RATHER THAN DOMESTIC OR PARTY POLITICAL  
ISSUES, WILL DETERMINE FATE OF RABIN GOVERNMENT. A NEW  
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POLITICAL CRISIS LEADING TO ELECTION OR FORMATION OF

NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT COULD BE PRECIPITATED BY JORDAN-ISRAEL NEGOTIATIONS, RENEWED HOSTILITIES OR EVEN INTENSIFIED WAVE OF CONTROVERSIAL WEST BANK SETTLEMENT ATTEMPTS. AT PRESENT RABIN'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL POSITION IS FORTUNATELY STRONGER THAN HIS NARROW NUMERICAL MAJORITY IN KNESSET WOULD SUGGEST. NEITHER LABOR ALIGNMENT NOR OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE EAGER FOR ELECTION. MOREOVER, OPPOSITION CANNOT TOPPLE GOVERNMENT WITHOUT DEFECTIONS FROM WITHIN LABOR ALIGNMENT CAMP. WHILE SOME ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT DAYAN'S RAFI FACTION WOULD BRING DOWN GOVERNMENT

BY WITHDRAWING ITS SUPPORT ON ALMOST ANY JORDAN-ISRAEL AGREEMENT ON FUTURE OF WEST BANK, WE ARE INCLINED TO BE SOMEWHAT SKEPTICAL. RABIN APPEARS TO GET ALONG REASONABLY WELL WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON AND HE HAS ESTABLISHED SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH NEW RAFI LEADER (AND CLOSE DAYAN ASSOCIATE) DEFENSE MINISTER SHIMON PERES. THIS SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO LABOR UNITY IN MONTHS AHEAD, THOUGH IT ALSO MAY REINFORCE RABIN'S DISINCLINATION TO STRIKE OUT WITH NEW FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES. WEAKNESS AND DIVISIONS OF OPPOSITION FORCES AS WELL AS CONSISTENT VOTING PATTERN OF ISRAELIS SHOULD ENABLE LABOR ALIGNMENT TO MAKE RELATIVELY STRONG SHOWING IF THERE IS 1975 ELECTION. THOUGH EARLY ELECTION WOULD PROBABLY BE PRECIPITATED BY PROSPECT OF IMPENDING WEST BANK TERRITORIAL WITHDRAWAL, IT WOULD OF COURSE BE CONTESTED ON SUM TOTAL OF GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON EVE OF HIS US VISIT, RABIN HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED HIS ABILITY TO LEAD ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IN CRITICAL PERIOD. BOTH MANNER AND CONTENT OF HIS DECISIONS HAVE ESTABLISHED BASIS FOR BUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, ALTHOUGH IT IS BROADLY RECOGNIZED THAT CHALLENGES OF SUMMER ARE ONLY PRELUDE TO MORE DIFFICULT AND FUNDAMENTAL DECISIONS WHICH LIE AHEAD. DETAILS OF WASHINGTON VISIT WILL BE CLOSELY SCRUTINIZED AND ITS OUTCOME WILL BE REGARDING BY RABIN, HIS OPPONENTS AND ISRAELI PUBLIC AS IMPORTANT BENCHMARK, PARTICULARLY GIVEN CURRENT CONCERN ABOUT US-ISRAEL RELATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS.

2. RABIN GOVERNMENT IN FIRST THREE MONTHS HAS ACTED DECISIVELY IN SEVERAL FIELDS: A) INTRODUCTION OF SERIES OF BELT-TIGHTENING  
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ANTI-INFLATIONARY MEASURES, B) FIRM HANDLING OF ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT ATTEMPTS IN SAMARIA, AND C) POLICY OF REPRISALS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON AGAINST ARAB TERRORISM, WHICH HAS, ACCORDING TO ISRAELI LIGHTS, BEEN SUCCESSFUL. (ALLON RECENTLY TOLD ME THAT THIS POLICY WAS WORKING, EVEN IF WE AMERICANS WERE NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT IT.) IN FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY AREAS, GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED TWOFOLD COMMITMENT--WILLINGNESS ACTIVELY TO SEEK NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS WITH ARAB STATES ON BASIS OF

TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE AND PREPAREDNESS FOR RENEWAL OF WAR IF NEGOTIATING PROCESS SHOULD FAIL. IN THIS APPROACH, RABIN HAS ATTEMPTED TO PORTRAY IMAGE OF CONTINUITY WITH ISRAEL'S SECURITY POLICY SINCE OCTOBER WAR. THIS SENSE OF CONTINUITY AND RABIN'S OWN INTRINSIC CAUTIOUSNESS HAVE DENIED OPPOSITION FORCES ANY OPENING SO FAR TO ERODE HIS NARROW PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY OR TO UNDERMINE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENTS PERFORMANCE.

3. STRIKING FEATURE OF NEW GOVERNMENT IS MANNER OF ITS DELIBERATIONS. CABINET MEETINGS REPORTEDLY ARE BASED ON WRITTEN WORKING PAPERS, OPTIONS ARE PRESENTED, DISCUSSIONS ARE OPEN AND DECISIONS ARE TAKEN BY MAJORITY VOTE. THERE WAS EVEN RECENT INSTANCE IN WHICH RABIN WAS IN MINORITY. THIS APPROACH STANDS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THAT OF MEIR GOVERNMENT IN WHICH NARROW CLIQUE (SARDONICALLY DUBBED "THE KITCHEN") TOOK ALL MAJOR DECISIONS, REDUCING CABINET AND KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE TO MERE RUBBER STAMP BODIES. RABIN, HOWEVER, HAS STILL TO ESTABLISH MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON SECURITY AFFAIRS WHICH WAS RECOMMENDED IN AGRANAT REPORT ON SHORTCOMINGS CONNECTED WITH OCTOBER WAR. REPORTEDLY, FACTIONAL AND PARTY CONSIDERATIONS HAVE BLOCKED ITS FORMATION, BUT RABIN MAY ALSO BE RELUCTANT TO ESTABLISHED FIXED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK WHICH COULD LIMIT HIS AUTHORITY OR RESTRICT HIS FREEDOM OF ACTION. RABIN REPORTEDLY IS ALSO OPPOSED TO CREATING NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL.

4. IT IS BROADLY BELIEVED THAT CRITICAL ISSUES WHICH WILL DETERMINE FATE OF RABIN GOVERNMENT IN MONTHS AHEAD ARE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS FIELD. ANY ONE OF THREE DEVELOPMENTS CONCEIVABLY COULD PRECIPITATE POLITICAL CRISIS, LEADING TO FORMATION OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT OR ELECTION: A) NEW WAR, PARTICULARLY IF IT WENT BADLY; B) RENEWED INTEN-

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SIFIED ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH SETTLEMENTS IN SAMARIA, IF THEY RESULTS IN SHOWDOWN OVER GOI SETTLEMENT POLICY OR C) NEGOTIATIONS WITH JORDAN INVOLVING WITHDRAWAL FROM SOME PART OF WEST BANK. ON LAST OF THESE, RABIN HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO GO TO ELECTORATE BEFORE SIGNING AGREEMENT WITH JORDAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH COMMITMENT WHICH HE MADE TO KNESSET ON JUNE 3.

5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES, WHILE THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO PRECIPITATE POLITICAL CRISIS, COULD HAVE IMPORTANT BEARING ON PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO RABIN GOVERNMENT AND, IF IT FALTERS, COULD STRENGTHEN HAND OF OPPOSITION FORCES IN DEMANDING MORE BROADLY BASED LEADERSHIP. THERE MAY BE PUBLIC OUTCRY AGAINST FURTHER ANTI-INFLATIONARY MEASURES AND EFFORTS TO PROTECT ISRAEL'S BALANCE OF PAYMENTS POSITION, PARTICULARLY

IF THEY SEEM LIKELY TO CREATE UNEMPLOYMENT IN CERTAIN KEY SECTORS. GOVERNMENT IS UNDOUBTEDLY COUNTING ON EXPANDED US FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO HELP IN THIS REGARD. OPPOSITION CAN BE EXPECTED TO EXPLOIT CHRONIC DISCONTENT OF ORIENTAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES WHICH CONTINUE TO LAG BEHIND IN CRITICAL FIELDS OF HOUSING AND EDUCATION.

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6. NEVERTHELESS RABIN'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION IN FACT IS STRONGER THAN HIS NARROW 61 (OUT OF 120) KNESSET MAJORITY WOULD SUGGEST. AFTER BRUISING DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONFRONTATIONS IN WAKE OF OCTOBER WAR, BOTH POLITICIANS AND PUBLIC APPEAR TO WANT AND TO HAVE ACHIEVED PERIOD OF RESPITE. MRS. MEIR'S RETIREMENT AND DAYAN'S DEPARTURE OF DEFENSE MINISTRY HAVE STILLED PROTEST MOVEMENTS, ALTHOUGH FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS NEED FOR ELECTORAL REFORM AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC METHODS OF MAJOR PARTIES TO WHICH THEY HAD CALLED ATTENTION OF COURSE HAVE NOT YET BEEN RESOLVED. TIMING AND

CONTENT OF SECOND, FINAL SECTION OF AGRANAT COMMISSION'S INQUIRY INTO OCTOBER WAR, WHICH HAD LOOMED AS MAJOR POLITICAL PITFALL, IS NO LONGER SIGNIFICANT ISSUE, ALTHOUGH ITS CONCLUSIONS COULD HAVE IMPORTANT BEARING ON IDF.

7. IN RECENT MONTHS THERE ALSO HAS BEEN NOTABLE CHANGE IN POLITICAL ATTITUDES TO ISSUE OF NEW ELECTION. WHEREAS AT  
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BEGINNING OF 1974, MOST POLITICIANS AND COMMENTATORS BELIEVED THAT ELECTION DURING SECOND HALF OF 1974 OR FIRST HALF OF 1975 WOULD BE UNAVOIDABLE, THERE APPEARS NOW TO BE BROAD CONSENSUS WITHIN LABOR ALIGNMENT AND OPPOSITION THAT AN ELECTION IS NEITHER IMMINENT NOR PARTICULARLY DESIRABLE.

8. NONE OF ISRAEL'S POLITICAL PARTIES WANT TO GO TO ELECTORATE IN NEAR FUTURE. LABOR ALIGNMENT WANTS TIME TO CONSOLIDATE ACHIEVEMENTS OF RABIN GOVERNMENT. ITS JUNIOR COALITION PARTNERS--INDEPENDENT LIBERALS AND CITIZENS RIGHTS MOVEMENT (CRM)--ARE ENJOYING PERQUISITES OF POWER AND HAVE NO MAJOR GRIPEs. MOREOVER FOR CRM, WHICH HAD STARTED AS DISSIDENT MOVEMENT, EARLY ELECTION MIGHT BE DEATH KNEEL SINCE IT COULD SCARCELY HOPE TO MAINTAIN SAME SUPPORTERS NOW THAT IT HAS RETURNED TO ESTABLISHMENT CAMP.

9. FOR OPPOSITION LIKUD, ELECTION WOULD INVOLVE DIVISIVE FACTIONAL STRUGGLE IN DRAWING UP ELECTORAL LISTS AND MAJOR FINANCIAL OUTLAY WITH DOUBTFUL PROSPECTS OF MAKING STRONGER SHOWING THAN THAT OF 1973. IN FACT, ELECTION COULD EXPOSE ITS FAILURE TO CONVINCE PUBLIC THAT IT CONSTITUTES MEANINGFUL ALTERNATIVE AND NOT JUST NEGATIVE OPPOSITION. FINALLY, FOR BADLY DIVIDED NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY, WHICH HAS STILL NOT BEEN ABLE TO FIND ITS WAY BACK TO GOVERNING COALITION, ELECTION COULD FORCE UNWANTED INTERNAL SHOWDOWN.

10 ISRAELIS GENERALLY REGARD MAJOR CURRENT DANGER TO SURVIVAL OF RABIN GOVERNMENT AS WITHIN LABOR PARTY ITSELF, PARTICULARLY POSITION OF DAYAN AND HIS RAFI FACTION. RABIN'S 61 SEAT KNESSET MAJORITY IS UNBEATABLE AS LONG AS LABOR PARTY STAYS UNITED, SINCE OPPOSITION AT MAXIMUM CAN ONLY MUSTER 54 VOTES. SOME ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT, AT APPROPRIATE MOMENT, DAYAN IN SEEKING TO MAKE POLITICAL COMEBACK MIGHT TURN AGAINST LABOR PARTY IN CRITICAL VOTE ON ISSUES RELATED TO DISPOSITION OF JORDAN WEST BANK.

11. IN OUR JUDGMENT, HOWEVER, DAYAN THREAT IS OVERESTIMATED. BY HIS OWN ADMISSION, DAYAN HAS NO HOME OTHER THAN LABOR PARTY. AFTER BITTER UNSATISFACTORY EXPERIENCE OF RAFI

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BREAKAWAY IN 1965 (IN WHICH DAYAN FOLLOWED BEN GURION OUT OF MAINSTREAM MAPAI), DAYAN WILL REFLECT MOST CAREFULLY ON POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES BEFORE TRYING TO PULL RAFI FACTION OUT OF LABOR PARTY. MOREOVER, IT IS FAR FROM CERTAIN THAT HIS RAFI ASSOCIATES PERES AND YAACOBI, RESPECTIVELY MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND TRANSPORTATION, WOULD FOLLOW HIS LEAD. RABIN AND PERES HAVE ESTABLISHED CLOSE, EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP WHICH, AS LONG AS IT LASTS, SHOULD ENSURE THAT LABOR PARTY WILL STAY UNITED. MORE, RABIN ALSO APPEARS TO GET ALONG REASONABLY WELL WITH ALLON, WHO IS HEAD OF AHDUT AVODAH FACTION, DESPITE OCCASIONAL UNDERTONES OF TENSION BETWEEN THEM.

12. WE ALSO DOUBT THAT RABIN AND PERES WOULD ENTER INTO PARTIAL AGREEMENT WITH JORDAN INVOLVING WITHDRAWAL FROM PART OF WEST BANK WITHOUT PROTECTING THEIR DOMESTIC FLANK IN ADVANCE. THIS MEANS THAT THEY AND THEIR SENIOR MILITARY AUTHORITIES CAN BE EXPECTED TO REQUIRE CREDIBLE ASSURANCE TO PUBLIC THAT ISRAELI SECURITY WILL NOT BE JEOPARDIZED BY TERMS OF ANY AGREEMENT.

13. MOREOVER, ANY ELECTION WOULD NOT BE CONTESTED ON ONE ISSUE ALONE. RABIN WOULD BE JUDGED ON NET SUM OF HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AND FAILINGS, NOT JUST ON TERMS OF WEST BANK SETTLEMENT. INDEED, IF HE ALSO COULD PRESENT SECOND STAGE AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT TO ELECTORATE, PROSPECTS OF LABOR ALIGNMENT MAKING RELATIVELY STRONG SHOWING AT POLLS PROBABLY WOULD BE FURTHER ENHANCED.

14. RABIN HAS SPOKEN TWICE THIS SUMMER ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF FORMING NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT ON CONDITION THAT ITS MEMBERS ACCEPT PRINCIPLE OF SEEKING NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS WITH ARAB STATES ON BASIS OF TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE. SEVERAL LIKUD MKS AND MAYORS ALSO HAVE CALLED FOR FORMATION OF ENLARGED GOVERNMENT ON THIS BASIS. BUT, WHILE LIKUD AND NRP ARE EAGER TO SEE UNITY GOVERNMENT FORMED, THEY CANNOT ACCEPT RABIN'S STIPULATED CONDITIONS. WE BELIEVE, THAT PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT ARE QUITE LIMITED, ALTHOUGH IT CANNOT BE COMPLETELY DISCOUNTED FROM RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES IF NEW CRISIS DEVELOPS (E.G. LIKE THAT BEFORE JUNE 1967 WAR).

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15. IN SUM, I BELIEVE THAT RABIN IN FIRST THREE MONTHS  
HAS GOTTEN OFF TO SOUND START AND SHOULD BE ABLE TO  
CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION FURTHER IN MONTHS AHEAD. WEAKNESS  
AND DIVISIONS OF OPPOSITION CAMP, TACTICAL RESTRICTIONS  
ON DAYAN'S MANEUVERING SPACE, AND INNATE CONSISTENCY OF  
ISRAELI VOTING PATTERNS SHOULD ASSURE RABIN REASONABLY  
GOOD PROSPECTS OF SUCCESS IF THERE IS ELECTION NEXT YEAR.  
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## Message Attributes

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